Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RABAT 00919 01 OF 02 181621Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 NSA-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 /084 W
----------181832 096711 /45
R 181541Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1050
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL TANGIER
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 0919

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MO
SUBJECT: MOROCCAN ELECTORAL PROCESS CONTINUES

REF: RABAT 0052

1. SUMMARY: THE JANUARY 25 SWEEP OF PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES BY PRO-REGIME "INDEPENDENT" CANDIDATES PROVOKED A NEW WAVE OF OPPOSITION CHARGES OF GOVERNMENT PRESSURE TACTICS. THE OPPOSITION BRANDISHED A POSSIBLE BOYCOTT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, BUT, CALLING FOR IMPROVED GUARANTEES, SEEMS INCLINED TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATION. THE KING'S CHOICE FOR NEW MINISTER OF INTERIOR, A FIRM BUT RESPECTED FIGURE, AND RESUMPTION OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE PALACE AND THE OPPOSITION ARE SIGNS THAT THE PALACE IS MOVING INTO THE LAST PHASE OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, WITH DIRECT ELECTIONS FOR TWO-THIRDS OF PARLIAMENT NOW EXPECTED ON APRIL 1. END SUMMARY

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PAGE 02 RABAT 00919 01 OF 02 181621Z

2. PROVINCIAL AND PREFECTURAL ELECTIONS HELD: ON JANUARY 25, MOROCCO'S NEW RURAL AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS CHOSE FROM THEIR RANKS REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES (PREFECTURAL ASSEMBLIES IN RABAT AND CASABLANCA). THE THREE SAHARA PROVINCES ALSO PARTICIPATED. THESE ASSEMBLIES HAVE LIMITED POWERS, MAINLY INVOLVING BUDGETARY QUESTIONS, BUT THE RESULTS STIRRED CONTROVERSY. PRO-GOVERNMENT "INDEPENDENT" CANDIDATES AS EXPECTED WON MAJORITIES

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

IN ALL 33 ASSEMBLIES AND CORNERED 71 PERCENT OF THE 513 SEATS, BENEFITTING FROM HEAVY WEIGHTING OF RURAL AREAS. PROMINENT SUPPORTERS OF THE REGIME WERE SELECTED TO HEAD THE ASSEMBLIES, RECOUPING EARLIER LOSSES IN COMPETITION FOR PRESIDENCIES OF LOCAL COUNCILS.

3. ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE; PARTY CONTENTIOUSNESS AND GOVERNMENT FIRMNESS: THE OPPOSITION CHARGED THAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THROUGH-OUT THE KINGDOM HAD GONE ALL OUT TO RIG THE RESULTS OF THE JAN. 25 VOTING. ISTIQLAL LEADER BOUCETTA ISSUED A STATEMENT JAN. 27 BRANDISHING THE THREAT OF BOYCOTT OF THE REMAINDER OF ELECTORAL PROCESS. THE OPPOSITION MAINTAINED THAT, UNLIKE EARLIER ABUSES ATTRIBUTED TO OVERZEALOUS LOCAL OFFICIALS, THE JAN. 25 "MANIPULATION" COULD ONLY HAVE COME FROM ON HIGH. THE REGIME, THE OPPOSITION ASSERTED PRIVATELY, HAD BEEN ALARMED BY THE OPPOSITION'S STRONG SHOWING IN NOVEMBER AND SEEMED BENT ON VIRTUALLY ELIMINATING THE OPPOSITION FROM THE UPCOMING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. FURTHER OPPOSITION-CITED "PROOF" OF GOVERNMENT BAD FAITH WAS THAT THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION HAD NOT MET SINCE NOVEMBER (AND THUS HAD NOT SUPERVISED THE JANUARY 25 VOTING); PROMISED INVESTIGATIONS INTO ALLEGED OFFICIAL ABUSES IN NOVEMBER HAD NOT BEEN CARRIED OUT; ONLY A FEW GOVERNORS WHO HAD BUNGLED ELECTION MANIPULATING HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED; WIDESPREAD COURT ACTIONS HAD ANNULLED NUMEROUS NOVEMBER 12 VICTORIES OF OPPOSITION CANDIDATES (AND OF A FEW IDENEPENDENTS); THE SUPPOSEDLY ENLARGED POWERS OF LOCAL COUNCILS WERE NOT IN FACT BEING TRANSFERRED TO THE COUNCILS BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES; AND CENSORSHIP OF OPPOSITION PAPERS HAD INCREASED MARKEDLY.

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4. IN ADDITION, THE USFP WAS SHAKEN BY STIFF SENTENCES METED OUT TO 22 PARTY MILITANTS IMPLICATED IN DECEMBER STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND BY THE INITIATION OF TRIALS FEBRUARY 7 IN SAFI AND MARRAKECH OF PARTY MEMBERS ACCUSED OF INVOLVEMENT IN 1973 SUBVERSION BUT WHO HAD BEEN ON PROVISIONAL LIBERTY. THE PARTY VIEWED "DETENTIONS AND HARASSMENTS" AS PART OF A GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN OF ELECTION-RELATED INTIMIDATION. USFP LEADERSHIP WAS REPORTEDLY UNDER STRONG PRESSURE FROM ITS MILITANTS. A FIRM WARNING TO THE EXTREME LEFT WAS SEEN IN THE FEBRUARY 15 OUTCOME OF THE CASABLANCA TRIAL OF "MARXIST-LENINISTS", WITH FIVE PRINCIPALS AND 39 FUGITIVES RECEIVING LIFE IMPRISONMENT AND MOST OTHERS LONG TERMS. (THE GOVERNMENT BANNED LE MONDE OVER A JANUARY 23 PAID ADVERTISEMENT SYMPATHIZING WITH THE DEFENDANTS.)

5. THE SELF-APPOINTED SPOKESMAN FOR THE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES, SEMI-OFFICIAL LE MATIN DIRECTOR AHMED ALAOUI, RETORTED EDITORIALLY THAT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES HAD FREQUENTLY PROFITED FROM OFFICIAL INTERVENTIONS BY THEIR SUPPORTERS WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION AND THAT THE INDEPENDENTS FILLED A POLITICAL VACUUM AND WERE AN

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

"AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF MOROCCO'S SILENT MAJORITY." IN LE MATIN FEBRUARY 13, ALAOUI HEADLINED MOVES TOWARD FORMAL ORGANIZATION OF THE INDEPENDENTS, BEGINNING IN FES, WHERE HE IS PRESIDENT OF THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY. TALK OF SUCH AN ORGANIZATION HAD FIRST BEEN SURFACED BY ALAOUI IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE NOVEMBER LOCAL ELECTIONS BUT HAD QUICKLY EVAPORATED, LEADING OPPOSITION SOURCES TO CONCLUDE THAT THE PALACE HAD DECIDED AGAINST PREMATURE POLARIZATION.

6. ELECTION TO PROFESSIONAL CHAMBERS NEXT, THEN PARLIAMENT: ELECTIONS TO PROFESSIONAL CHAMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO BEGIN IN LATE FEBRUARY. THESE CHAMBERS, ALONG WITH THE LOCAL COUNCILS, WILL FEED INTO THE INDIRECTLY-ELECTED THIRD OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT IN PROPORTIONS TO BE SPELLED OUT BY A FUTURE DECREE. THE CHAMBERS ARE ALSO TO PROVIDE MEMBERS TO PROVINCIAL AND PREFECTURAL ASSEMBLIES.

7. A SIGNAL THAT THE PALACE WAS MOVING INTO THE FINAL STAGE OF
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PAGE 04 RABAT 00919 01 OF 02 181621Z

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, THE KING ON FEBRUARY 10 NAMED MOHAMED BENHIMA TO TAKE OVER THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (RABAT 790). BENHIMA, USED BY THE KING IN DIFFICULT MOMENTS IN THE PAST, IS RESPECTED FOR BOTH INTEGRITY AND FIRMNESS. OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION TO BENHIMA OVER THE APPOINTMENT, ACCORDING TO A SOURCE CLOSE TO THE MINISTER, BUT SOME PARTY SOURCES HAVE CONFIDED THEIR CONCERN THAT FIRMNESS RATHER THAN INTEGRITY WILL BE STRESSED.

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PAGE 01 RABAT 00919 02 OF 02 181635Z
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----------181836 096904 /45
R 181541Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RABAT 0919

8. IN A FURTHER MOVE, THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL WAS CONVOKED FEBRUARY 14 UNDER THE KING'S AUSPICES FOR ITS FIRST MEETING SINCE LAST NOVEMBER. WE UNDERSTAND THE KING ASSURED PARTY LEADERS OF HIS COMMITMENT TO PROCEED WITH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, TO BE HELD ON APRIL 1. (PARLIAMENT, ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, SHOULD BE SEATED ON APRIL 8.) THE KING ALSO HINTED AT WILLINGNESS TO REOPEN ELECTORAL LISTS ONCE AGAIN, SHORT OF THE OPPOSITION DEMAND FOR A COMPLETE REVISION. THE KING AGREED TO MEET INDIVIDUALLY WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS IF THEY DESIRED. A FOLLOW-UP MEETING OF THE COUNCIL CHAIRED BY PRIME MINISTER OSMAN WAS HELD FEBRUARY 17, BUT LEFT OPPOSITION DEMANDS UNRESOLVED. FURTHER MEETINGS ARE PROJECTED.

9. OUTLOOK: ON BALANCE, THE OPPOSITION SEEMS INCLINED TO CONTINUE ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS DESPITE ITS VOCAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST GOVERNMENT IRREGULARITIES AND FOR IMPROVED ELECTORAL GUARANTEES. SOME USFP-ISTIQLAL COORDINATION, WHICH HAD BROKEN DOWN CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 RABAT 00919 02 OF 02 181635Z

OVER THE NOVEMBER 12 ELECTION, HAS RESUMED. THE OPPOSITION, HOWEVER, WILL KEEP A BOYCOTT IN RESERVE AS ITS ULTIMATE WEAPON TO UNDERMINE THE CREDIBILITY OF ELECTIONS CONDUCTED IN A MANNER IT IS UNWILLING TO ACCEPT.

10. THE KING'S OWN HEAVY ENGAGEMENT IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IMPROVES CHANCES OF COMPROMISES. HE HAS A PUBLIC STAKE IN PROGRESS TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION AND WOULD PRESUMABLY LIKE TO HAVE A PARLIAMENT IN PLACE BEFORE TRAVELING ABROAD IN LATE SPRING. THE INDEPENDENTS ARE ALREADY ASSURED OF THE THIRD OF PARLIAMENT TO BE CHOSEN INDIRECTLY, AND THE AWAITED DECREE ON THE REMAINING TWO-THIRDS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ACCORD PREDOMINANT WEIGHT TO INDEPENDENT-CONTROLLED RURAL AREAS, THUS GIVING A COMFORTABLE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY OF OVER TWO-THIRDS TO SUPPORT THE STRONG POWERS ATTRIBUTED TO THE KING AND GOVERNMENT BY THE CONSTITUTION. QUESTIONS WHICH REMAIN UNANSWERED ARE HOW THE EXPECTED PRO-GOVERNMENT MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT WILL BE ORGANIZED AND HOW THE NEW POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT WILL BE CONSTITUTED, PRESUMABLY WITH SOME OPPOSITION PARTICIPATION.
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Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

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22 May 2009
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